

First Lady Suzanne Carcieri Joins Substance Abuse Prevention Task Forces and Law Enforcement in Introducing New Underage Drinking Prevention Website and Billboard



Picture: Ms. Kathy Sullivan, Director of the Barrington BAY-Team, First Lady Susanne Carcieri and Chief John M. LaCross after a press conference at the State House supporting the new under age drinking website created by Mrs. Carcieri. www.substancefreekids.ri.gov

Announcement Comes With the Approach of Prom Season, Graduation Season and Summer Vacation – All Times When More Youth Engage in Risky Behaviors

Rhode Island First Lady Suzanne O. Carcieri joined with Governor Donald L. Carcieri, Attorney General Patrick Lynch, Family Court Chief Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah, Jr., local substance abuse prevention task force coordinators, law enforcement officials, MHRH Director Craig Stenning, and other prevention advocates today to introduce a new state website offering substance abuse prevention resources and a new billboard promoting an underage drinking prevention message. The website and billboard campaign come just before prom season, graduation season, and the summer vacation months when many youth experiment with alcohol for the first time.

“We live in a fast-paced society that exposes our children to unhealthy messages and distractions, a fact that puts them at high risk for underage drinking and substance abuse. Parents have to be more vigilant and informed than ever to protect their children,” said Mrs. Carcieri, a mother of four and grandmother to fourteen. “Information is a powerful prevention tool, and I want our families, schools, youth, and community to know that there are user-friendly resources on a State website that can help keep our children safe.”

The website www.substancefreekids.ri.gov is tailored to parents, community members, educators, and youth, with sections devoted to each group. Kids and teens can learn how to resist peer

pressure and make good decisions, parents can learn about how to talk to their teens and recognize the signs of substance abuse, and educators and community members can learn about what they can do to create a safe environment for kids. A 3-D diagram shows how alcohol and drugs affect a teen's developing brain.

Links to local substance abuse prevention task forces, MADD-RI, and the Rhode Island Department of Mental Health, Retardation, and Hospitals are listed, along with links to national reports and organizations. While most of the website focuses on prevention, there is a section providing information and resources to help when a child is already involved in drugs or alcohol.

"We know that true prevention of substance abuse only works at the community level and among families," said Craig Stenning, director of the Department of Mental Health, Retardation, and Hospitals. "This new website is a valuable resource for the families of our state, and is but a small indication of Mrs. Carcieri's commitment to a healthy Rhode Island."

A new anti-underage drinking billboard, which can be seen by drivers traveling northbound on Route 95 near Route 10 and by drivers traveling southbound on Route 295 near the Warwick Mall, will be displayed until early June. It shows Rhode Island State Police placing a teenage girl in a police cruiser and carries the message "Don't Be A Party to Underage Drinking." The billboard was developed by a coalition of Rhode Island Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force coordinators in collaboration with MADD and the Rhode Island State Police, with the support of the Rhode Island Department of Mental Health, Retardation, and Hospitals and the national Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

"With the prom and graduation season upon us, we hope that our billboards will serve to remind our young people of the consequences of underage drinking. We want their celebrations to become life-long memories and not reminders of a tragedy that could have been prevented," said Rhode Island State Police Superintendent Brendan P. Doherty.

Although recent statistics show that underage drinking and substance abuse rates have declined modestly over the last 10 years, Rhode Island still ranks among the top ten states in the nation for binge drinking for young people aged 12 – 25, and among the top ten states for alcohol use reported in the past month among that population. According to the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, over 36% of young people reported alcohol use; over 23% of young people reported binge drinking. Data from the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reveals that 70% of students aged 12 – 17 years have tried alcohol.

Speakers talked about the need to protect children from the devastating consequences of alcohol, which can include:

Changes in brain development that may have life-long effects

- * Death from alcohol poisoning
- * Physical and sexual assault
- * Higher risk for suicide and homicide
- * Injuries from alcohol-related car crashes and other accidents such as from burns and falls
- * School problems, such as higher absences and poor or failing grades
- * Social problems, such as fighting and lack of participation in youth activities
- * Legal problems, such as arrest for driving under the influence or fighting
- * Physical problems, such as hangovers or illnesses

- * Unwanted, unplanned, and unprotected sexual activity
- * Disruption of normal growth and sexual development
- * Memory problems
- * Abuse of other drugs

“Underage drinking is a national problem that affects all cities and states from Rhode Island to Alaska. It takes a collective responsibility by the community members of faith based organizations, high school coaches and administrators, parents & mentors, law enforcement officials and town administrators to address this serious issue,” said Barrington Police Chief John M. LaCross. “The creation of Mrs. Carcieri’s new website will greatly enhance the efforts of our Barrington community through a broader state-wide level of awareness and education. I am sincerely grateful for Mrs. Carcieri’s proactive approach in recognizing the issue of underage drinking on a state level.”

“There are 35 substance abuse prevention coalitions across the state and we have been combating underage drinking for many years. The, “Don’t be a party to underage drinking” billboard is a culmination of our efforts so far this year and hopefully serves as a strong message to youth, adults and our business partners to step up and do their part to prevent underage drinking in Rhode Island,” said Nancy Devaney, coordinator of the Narragansett Prevention Coalition. “We need to protect our youth by implementing a host of initiatives like this new website and media efforts that get the message out.”

Mrs. Carcieri also drew attention to a TV ad campaign developed by the Cranston Substance Abuse and Youth Violence Prevention Task Force which has a hopeful message for youth. Teens from Cranston High School East and Cranston High School West state their dreams for the future, with a concluding message: “Don’t Let Alcohol Turn Your Dreams Into Nightmares.”

“The TV ads created by the Cranston task force underscore what we are trying to impress upon our kids: that alcohol has the potential to harm them now and destroy their dreams for the future. The only way to stay safe and realize their dreams is to avoid experimenting and getting involved in substance abuse,” concluded Mrs. Carcieri.

Mrs. Carcieri, a member of the National Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free, has been involved in and supportive of substance abuse prevention efforts throughout her time as First Lady. She has visited a number of schools over the years to teach children about the negative effects of alcohol on their brain development, and she hosted a visit from the Acting U.S. Surgeon General last year that included awareness building activities and meetings throughout the state. The Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free is an organization of first spouses, former first spouses, federal agencies, and other organizations working together in an effort to prevent and reduce underage drinking, especially among youth aged 9 to 15 years old.

Related links

Department or agency: Office of the Governor

Online: <http://www.governor.ri.gov>